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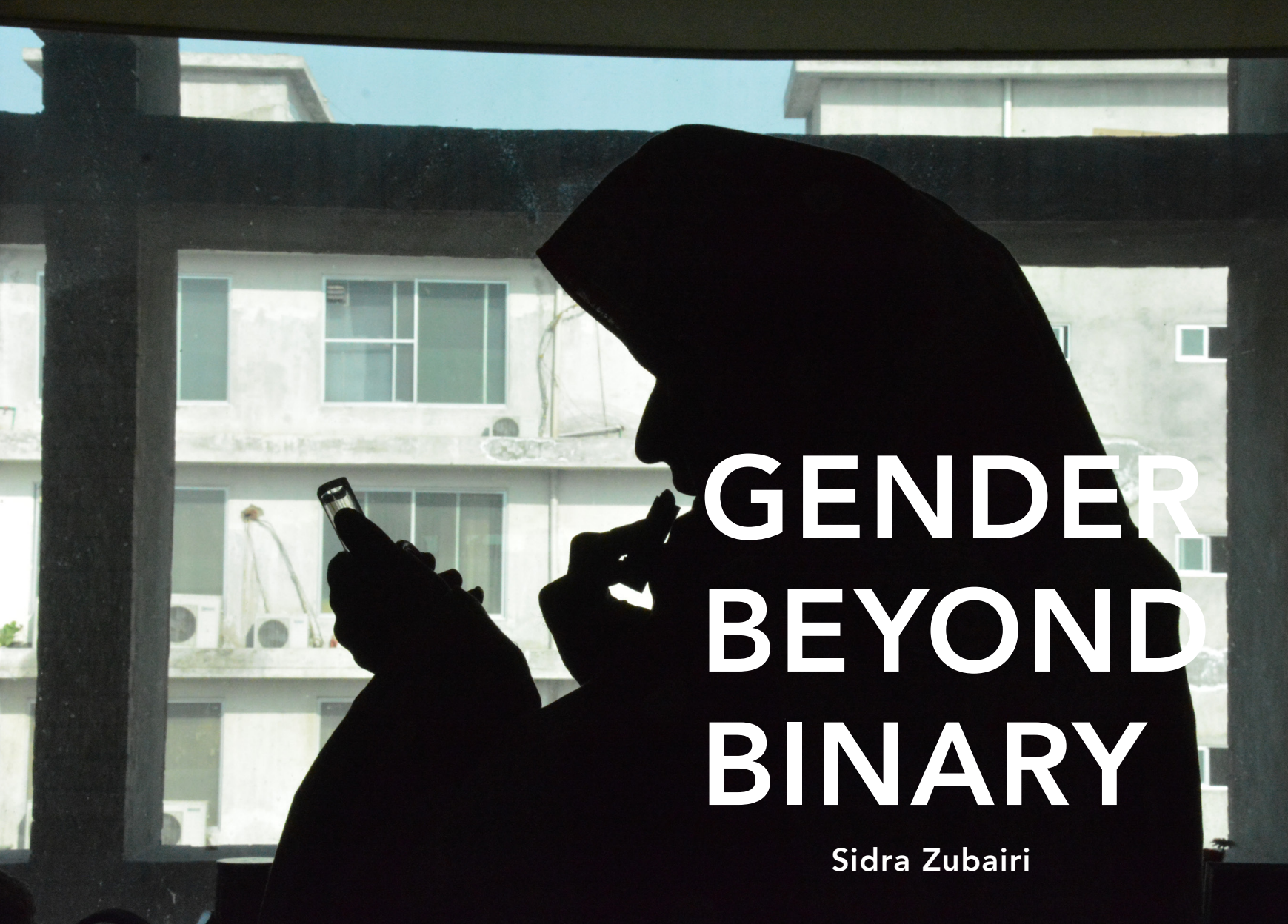
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A high-contrast photograph featuring a person in silhouette, wearing a hijab, looking down at a smartphone held in their right hand. The person is positioned in the foreground, with their back to the camera. The background shows a multi-story building with several windows and air conditioning units, viewed through a dark frame that suggests a window or a balcony railing. The lighting is bright, creating a stark contrast between the dark silhouette and the lighter background.

# GENDER BEYOND BINARY

Sidra Zubairi



# PAKISTAN'S HIJRA COMMUNITY



Approval certificate for Sidra Zubairi for the thesis project entitled Gender Beyond Binary: Pakistan's Hijra Community. Submitted to the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts in Design of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar in partial fulfillment for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Design.

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# CONTENTS

|                               |             |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>ABSTRACT</b>               | <b>[9]</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>           | <b>[11]</b> |
| <b>BACKGROUND</b>             |             |
| Literature Review             | [14]        |
| Precedent Studies             | [21]        |
| <b>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b>   |             |
| Performative Gender           | [36]        |
| Methodologies                 | [42]        |
| <b>EXPLORATIONS</b>           |             |
| Adaptable Features            | [50]        |
| Mechanisms                    | [53]        |
| <b>PROJECT OUTCOMES</b>       |             |
| Transformable Shalwaar Kameez | [63]        |
| Adaptive Khussas              | [71]        |
| Template Guide                | [74]        |
| <b>CONCLUSION</b>             | <b>[76]</b> |
| <b>FUTURE DIRECTION</b>       | <b>[78]</b> |
| <b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>        | <b>[80]</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>           | <b>[82]</b> |



SORTING

ABSTRACT

Transgender individuals challenge the binary definition of gender accepted in Pakistani society and as a result, Pakistan's transgender community is highly marginalized. Pakistani society regards transgender individuals as "abnormal," because their physical appearance and behavior fail to conform with conventional expectations. Based on contextual research and interviews conducted with transgender individuals in Pakistan, my thesis explores the obstacles transgender individuals face in the course of everyday survival. My research responds to the physical realities of being transgender in Pakistani society, and analyzes cultural norms associated with gender, which trigger harassment. By designing transformable apparel for these individuals, informed by primary and secondary research, my goal is to help them cope with the everyday struggles of being transgender in Pakistan.





# INTRODUCTION

Faisal, a 28-year-old man, applies makeup as he prepares for a party at a friend's place in Lahore. He dresses hastily, lest he arrive late. During the week Faisal dresses conventionally, to escape harassment, but on the weekend, he is free to reveal his hidden inner self. Faisal understands the risks of dressing as a woman when going out; he understands that he is transgender but knows that society does not accept it. Being transgender in Pakistan is considered taboo—not something to be exhibited outwardly. To elude the possibility of discrimination, Faisal—also known as Julie among her transgender friends—must avoid being spotted going to work dressed as Julie. In Pakistan, Julie's community is not embraced by the rest of the population. Pakistani society does not sanction someone who was born male dressing as a woman—even if his identity aligns entirely with the female gender.

1 "Pakistan Ranks 180 in Literacy: UNESCO | Pakistan Today," accessed February 24, 2018

2 Majid Bashir Muhammad, "The Subjugation of Transgenders," February 24, 2018

Pakistan, a country rich in history and culture, is majority Muslim. Over 40 percent of adults are illiterate, lacking awareness about gender and transgender equality.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, many people do not allow transgender individuals to live as they wish.<sup>2</sup> Gender is defined by one's biological sex at birth. The norms and values of Pakistani society dictate fixed categories for male and female genders: people are judged not by their nature, but by physical appearance. The transgender community is highly marginalized because it does not fit the binary gender categories "approved" by society. The public regards transgender people as "abnormal" because of their physical manner and behavior.

Transgender individuals in Pakistan relish the physical transformation afforded by makeup and fancy apparel. For them, dressing up is simply a way to exhibit who they are. But society does not approve of a man dressing as a woman. People refuse to see gender identity as an individual choice and construction. In Pakistan, transgender individuals face violence and public harassment, triggered simply by the way they dress and behave. Like Julie, many transgender individuals mask their identity, managing the way they express themselves in public, for their everyday survival. In a society where gender boundaries are so constrained, how do transgender individuals find ways to fit in? How do they pursue ordinary, productive lives free from harassment?

Informed by Judith Butler's conception of gender performance identity, this thesis focuses on physical aspects of being transgender in Pakistani society, and it examines cultural norms that trigger violence against the transgender community.<sup>3</sup> This research investigates the everyday struggles faced by transgender individuals in Pakistani society and posits a series of designed solutions in the form of adaptable apparel. These items are intended specifically for transgender individuals in Pakistan, to help them bridge the gap between what people need to fully express themselves—and how to cope with hostility in their day-to-day lives. By designing adaptable and transformative clothing to help them survive through the harsh realities they face, the aim is to empower these individuals to become a more integral part of the society, in a subversive manner. Since the dominant religion in Pakistan is Islam, this thesis avoids providing any religious implications of gender, and instead discusses gender from a theoretical perspective by proposing design solutions based on primary and secondary research findings.

<sup>3</sup> Dairah, "Understanding the Transgender Community in Pakistan," November 21, 2016

**BACKGROUND**

## Literature Review

4 Chughtai, Alia. "Transgender People Targeted in Fatal Karachi Attack | Pakistan News | Al Jazeera," July 30, 2017

5 Umer Ali, "A Transgender Tragedy in Pakistan The Diplomat," accessed February 24, 2018

6 Khan, "Transgender Dignity in Islam," May 23, 2016

7 Khan, "Transgender Dignity in Islam," May 23, 2016

There is nothing new about gender discrimination. Its dark history spans cultures and time and recent demographic reports show that frequent incidents of gender-based violence have become an issue.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan suffers ongoing gender inequality, and the transgender community is highly targeted.<sup>5</sup> Even though transgender individuals have fought for equality and recognition for years,<sup>6</sup> they are still deprived of the necessities of everyday life. There is a clash between the socially constructed idea of gender and how it is perceived individually by transgender individuals. An examination of the division between personally and socially constructed notions of gender, along with Pakistan's legal and cultural history, indicates how violence towards transgender individuals still persists today.

Transgender individuals in Pakistan, often known as Khwajasaras or Mukhannathun, were highly regarded and treated with dignity in the Mughal era. Many were appointed as keepers of the mosque and guards of the royal female quarters. They were employed as personal, political and financial advisors by Muslim rulers.<sup>7</sup>

Liaquat Ali Khan, a human rights activist and lawyer, discusses the history of transgender individuals during the colonial and post-colonial era in his article, "Transgender Dignity in Islam." During the 18th century Mughal-Muslim era, British colonials arriving in what is now Pakistan caused a distinct shift in the way transgender individuals were treated, acknowledged, and accepted. British colonials were disgusted by the existence of "eunuchs"—a term used at the time to refer to transgender individuals—and, subsequently passed

8 Khan, "Transgender Dignity in Islam,"  
May 23, 2016

the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act, relegating them to criminal status. With this act, Hijra (transgender individuals) became unemployable, and were forced to earn a meager living as dancers, beggars and prostitutes. Even though official authorities reappraised the Act of 1871 in 1949, discrimination and violence against these individuals persists, due to the discriminatory attitudes it shaped, which prevail to this day.<sup>8</sup>

9 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender  
Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and  
Feminist Theory,"

10 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender  
Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and  
Feminist Theory,"

11 Thurman, Judith. "Introduction to Simone de  
Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'." *The New York Times*,  
May 27, 2010

To fully understand the consequences of gender discrimination, it is important to define the term gender. People often understand gender as simply a synonym for sex, however, gender studies scholar Judith Butler argues that sex and gender are two separate entities. In her essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler views gender as a set of stylized behavioral and bodily acts performed by an individual in a social framework. Furthermore, by digging deeper into the idea of gender and one's conception of identity, she claims that gender identity is a form of performative accomplishment that is shaped by social laws and taboo.<sup>9</sup> Setting Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as a foundation for her claim, Butler states that the human body is just a display of active cultural processes. The way these processes are performed—as if for an audience—through gestures, movements, and other acts, are considered an actual sense of gender. The understanding of gender is not confined to just being male or female. One's sense of gender is dynamic and evolves over the course of one's life. As Butler suggests, various performed acts create the idea of gender; without these acts, there would be no gender.<sup>10,11</sup>



12 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."  
21, 2016

Informed by Butler's argument, it becomes evident that transgender individuals are in-line with gender as a means of self-expression. Men and women are shaped culturally, and they perform accordingly; the body is a cultural sign. Individual behavior defines the true meaning of gender. Culture—in this view—becomes a stage where each individual performs. Butler supports this idea by describing gender as a series of acts that can be viewed as a script, which is revised, rehearsed, renewed, and finally, performed.<sup>12</sup>

13 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."  
21, 2016

Hence, transgender individuals challenge socially constructed, binary definitions of gender. They are not defined by the two sexual categories of male and female, but by their acts. Butler argues that being transgender is as real as anyone else's gender, and by looking at gender as a performative act, transgender individuals meet society's expectation of gender. Certain acts become an expressive representation of gender identity, and these acts are either parallel to society's expectation or in opposition. According to Butler, gender is not printed on the body, but rather, it is an internal matter that cannot be judged by language or nature.<sup>13</sup>

14 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing  
Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (June 1987): 125–51,

Following the above argument, Candace West and Don Zimmerman's article, "Doing Gender," also expands an understanding of gender. Like Butler, Zimmerman and West introduce gender as an accomplishment, rather than a social role or social quality. As expressed in their article, gender is an outcome of social practices and behaviors that define masculinity or femininity. Performing a gender role, which the article calls "doing of gender," establishes male/female division as natural, a gender division that society accepts and approves.<sup>14</sup> Traditional gender perceptions interpret male and female into socially unequal categories. As a result, these principles of male

15 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing  
Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (June 1987): 125–51,

16 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (June 1987): 125–51,

and female behaviors have deep social implications. In "Doing Gender," West and Zimmerman refuse to see gender as a social construct, arguing for a more complex relationship between social and physical aspects of gender.<sup>15</sup> West and Zimmerman's definition of gender parallels Butler's insight into gender as a performative act. They see gender as a formation of everyday interaction in social activities, and these interactions, therefore, determine the distinction between male and female characteristics that are created by an organized performance.<sup>16</sup>

Gender is represented by our everyday action and behavior. It is a socially required practice that is conducted in the presence of others and is not restrained to only the customs of male and female behavior. It is critical for society to expand its understanding of gender and perceive it through a non-binary gender perspective. Although many people perceive gender as a social construct, it is also essential to recognize how society identifies gender. Society often confuses gender with sex and therefore permits certain types of behaviors for both male and female based on biological sex.

17 Amy M. Blackstone, "Gender Roles and Society," in *Human Ecology: An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*, ed. Julia R. Miller, 2003, 335–38,

Amy Blackstone, a professor at the University of Minnesota, evaluates the expectations of gender roles in her article "Gender Roles and Society." She states that society aligns and often confuses gender with sex, based on beliefs about sex differences. Sex and gender are separate concepts; one is completely aligned with biological traits, the other with one's psychological state.<sup>17</sup> In other words, gender is the value that is attributed to sex. Gender roles are the sets of behaviors and activities expected from society, based on one's sex. Such cultural expectations have passed through generations, embedded as "appropriate and normal," reinforcing those expectations.

Most societies expect men and women to only perform the set gender roles that are socially and religiously acceptable. These assumptions are enforced from a very early stage, where girls are defined as future caretakers of the home, and boys are expected to be future financial providers. Anyone who does not fit into this binary gender system is cast out, targeted and labeled abnormal. This condition sets the stage for other complications in the society, especially regarding transgender or hermaphrodite individuals. One is forced to think about how and where these individuals fit into the set boundaries of social gender regulations.

Faris Ahmed Khan, a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Brandeis University, presented a comprehensive dissertation concerning the issues of Khawaja Siras, a respectful term used for transgender individuals in Pakistan. In, "Khawaja Sira: Culture, Identity Politics, and 'Transgender' Activism in Pakistan," Khan explains that Islamic clerics and their interpretations about intersex individuals have made life difficult for them. He focuses on religious clerics of Pakistan, explaining how they emphasize the physical appearance of transgender individuals, while giving no consideration to how they identify.<sup>18</sup>

Considering that Pakistan is a very conservative country with a high illiteracy rate, there is very little tolerance toward transgender individuals. Khan also discusses Islamic laws that revolve around sex reassignment surgeries and points out that no rulings have been passed to allow transgender individuals freedom of physical self-identification. Another aspect that Khan highlights in his work is the reality of street begging. Transgender individuals are often seen begging on the streets, due to lack of employment or educational opportunities. Even though begging is illegal in Pakistan, the transgender community is dependent on street begging to survive, which makes them vulnerable to harassment, discrimination and violence.<sup>19</sup>

18 Khan, Faris Ahmed. "Khawaja Sira: Culture, Identity Politics, and 'Transgender' Activism in Pakistan." 06, 2014

19 Khan, Faris Ahmed. "Khawaja Sira: Culture, Identity Politics, and 'Transgender' Activism in Pakistan." 06, 2014

These trends and historical realities facing the transgender community in Pakistan create an atmosphere of discrimination and rejection for the transgender community, based on the closed-minded view of gender as strictly binary. Lack of tolerance and awareness makes it nearly impossible for these individuals to survive in society, due to the violence and extreme hate they face. In order to be more accepting of transgender individuals, it is important to perceive the distinction between sex and gender in a more informed way and consider it beyond the lens of physical appearance.

**PRECEDENTS**

Interested in developing approaches to mitigate discrimination and harassment through clothing design, I began researching examples of designed apparel and accessories that explore notions of transformation, adaptation and dynamic expression. The following examples demonstrate how a quick clothing transformation can help a person adapt from one context to another with ease.





Figure 1.0

RISE

The Autumn 2013 Rise collection, by Hussein Chalayan, is a series of multi-layered dresses that each transform with a single tug. Inspired by the dichotomy between disembodiment and metamorphosis, this collection consists of two-in-one dresses, each designed to convert effortlessly from day to evening wear with a simple tug at the neckline. A top layer of fabric drops down, like a curtain, concealing the layer underneath. With a simple motion, the dress on the left, in Figure 1.0, transforms into the long, elegant evening gown shown on the right.<sup>20</sup>

The Rise collection consists of dresses that open and transform—producing new manifestations of themselves. With the contrast between disembodiment and metamorphosis, this collection provides swift and practical transformations.

20 Dan Howarth, "Rise Autumn Winter 2013 Collection by Hussein Chalayan," Dezeen, March 6, 2013

*Figure 1.1*





Figure 2.0

Issey Miyake, in collaboration with Reality Lab, Tokyo, launched the brand, 132 5, in 2010. This collaboration resulted in a new production method and technique of folding clothes. The brand name references the way a one-dimensional piece of cloth (1D) becomes three-dimensional when worn (3D), and then gets folded back into a flat, two-dimensional surface afterward (2D). Wearing this piece of cloth, according to the designers, transforms it beyond dimensions and time, unlocking a fifth dimension (5D). The collection includes a variety of 3D shapes that are folded to form a flat surface.<sup>21</sup>

By cutting and assembling fabric to strategically adopt various forms, designers enable users to customize their clothing. The compelling idea behind this is the expansion of two-dimensional geometry into structured volumes that become shirts, pants and dresses. This dimensional transformation provides the wearer with choice and flexibility. Transformable items are more efficient and portable, requiring less storage space. Additionally, customization and choice empower individual expression.

<sup>21</sup> ISSEY MIYAKE INC., "132 5. ISSEY MIYAKE | BRANDS," ISSEY MIYAKE INC., accessed February 12, 2018



*Figure 2.1*



*Figure 3.0*

ALTER EGO



Julian Lim's project, *Alter Ego*, reimagines traditional headwear as a transformable, multi-use accessory. Lim deconstructs the typical form and function of the hat, creating alternate wearable pieces. The project invites alternate uses through simple interventions. Allowing the hat to be reshaped and modified, Lim's design grants new possibilities for the person wearing it, with distortable, reconfigurable forms.<sup>22</sup>

*Alter Ego*'s transformations rely on a single, simple mechanism: the zipper. By adjusting the zipper, the user distorts the head piece to make new forms and unlock new possible uses. Although the project is not designed strictly for practical application, it demonstrates how simple alterations add new life to an object's traditional form and function.

<sup>22</sup> Julian Lim, "ALTER EGO," accessed December 2, 2017

*Figure 3.1*







Figure 4.0

OUTERWEAR ANYWHERE

Angela Luna's adaptable clothing collection, *Outerwear Anywhere*, provides refugees with portable shelter that is also apparel. Luna's collection addresses everyday challenges faced by Syrian refugees. The collection encourages people—specifically refugees—to see design as a platform for discussing and addressing the need for shelter and safety. Additionally, *Outerwear Anywhere* encourages individuals to consider how clothing can accommodate basic necessities, particularly during crises. figure 4.0 and 4.1 show a two-part multipurpose jacket that can be transformed into a tent. The images highlight Syrian refugee's need for shelter, caused by the current crisis, and the project showcases advantages of adaptable, transformable clothing.<sup>23</sup>



23 Cadence Bambenek, "Looking to Help Refugees, This Design Student Created Jackets That Transform into Tents and Sleeping Bags," *Business Insider*, accessed January 20, 2018

*Figure 4.1*



*Figure 5.0*

VICE VERSA

Kristofers Reidzans's project, Vice Versa, is a line of dual-purpose products designed to alternate between two distinct functions. For example, as illustrated in figure 5.0 and 5.1, an overcoat also serves as a wall tapestry. Vice Versa is inspired by clothing archetypes and architectural shapes. Taken from the wall and worn on the body, the project undergoes a process of metamorphosis. Reidzans's transformable clothing, in its pressed and displayed mode, improves a room's overall atmosphere. The intent is to make clothes so well they can be regarded as artwork in their own right, obviating the need to hide them away in a closet.<sup>24</sup>

Vice Versa illustrates how clothing—as well as surroundings—can benefit from thoughtful design. A person's surroundings can adapt to the human body, and vice versa. This project also suggests a strategy for camouflaging wearable apparel within a space. Vice Versa's chameleon-like characteristics offer insight into the power of adapting to impact a given context or surrounding.

<sup>24</sup> "KRISTOFERS REIDZĀNS," KRISTOFERS REIDZĀNS (blog), accessed January 20, 2018

*Figure 5.1*







Figure 6.0

# PLAYFUL ELEMENTS

In her project, Playful Elements, Rezma Hassani explores how everyday wearable objects can be customized to cater to individual needs. By pushing the boundaries of form and material, Playful Elements investigates unconventional design and material combinations. Figure 6.0 and 6.1 show sandals with interchangeable straps and bases. The convertible features of the footwear are a playful puzzle, inviting the wearer to customize them according to mood and functional need.<sup>25</sup>

The customizability promotes individuality. Physically modifying the footwear, the person wearing it can give it a quirky aesthetic that makes it authentic and unique. Made from several materials, including wood, leather, foam, and rubber, the sandals have an athletic feel. Four base elements are held together with a strap, which can be removed and changed to suit a user's self-expression.

These projects—Rise, 132 5, Alter Ego, Outerwear Anywhere, Vice Versa, and Playful Elements—demonstrate how adaptable apparel can provide many useful benefits, and encourage people to think beyond the expected norm.



<sup>25</sup> Hassani, Razma. "PLAYFUL ELEMENTS." Accessed May 10, 2018

*Figure 6.1*



A high-contrast, black and white photograph featuring a person in silhouette. The person is wearing a hooded garment and is holding a mobile phone in their right hand, with their left hand near their face as if interacting with the device. The background shows a multi-story building with several windows and air conditioning units, suggesting an urban environment. The lighting is bright, creating a stark contrast between the dark silhouette and the lighter background.

CONCEPTUAL

**FRAMEWORK**



26 Tazeen S. Ali et al., "Gender Roles and Their Influence on Life Prospects for Women in Urban Karachi, Pakistan: A Qualitative Study," *Global Health Action* 4 (November 2, 2011)

27 K. Chauhan, *Gender Inequality in the Public Sector in Pakistan: Representation and Distribution of Resources* (Springer, 2014)

## Performative Gender

A review of secondary research indicates a shortage of gender theories addressing Pakistan. Gender issues provided by gender theorists in Pakistan exhibit bias towards conventional gender roles. Studies such as, "Gender Roles and Their Influence on Life Prospects for Women," portray women as subordinate.<sup>26</sup> Others, such as, "Gender Inequality in the Public Sector in Pakistan," only talk about gender inequality in Pakistan,<sup>27</sup> ignoring problems of gender perception in the society. Therefore, to understand gender and its implications for the lives of transgender individuals, my research relies on the work of Judith Butler, adapted to analyze conditions existing in Pakistan. Butler's concept of performative gender contributes to an understanding of gender as a series of acts, which are not culturally or religiously prescribed.

According to Judith Butler's theory, gender is defined as a set of performative events, through which one expresses aspects of male or female identity. Though the current discussion has already provided background on Butler's theory, it is important to elaborate on her use of the term performance—especially its physical aspect.

One aspect of performance, associated with popular entertainment, is the presto chango showmanship of quick-change performance. Quick-change is a performance genre, in which a magician rapidly changes outfits in front of an audience. One of the most influential performers of this genre was Arturo Brachetti, whose quick-change moves made him world-famous. Reflecting on his live tailcoat change, from black to white, I was struck by the symbolic power of such instantaneous transformation.

Figure 7.0  
*Arturo Brachetti during a performance*







Another inspiring act is David and Dania. Their “Quick Change Magical Transformation” is a unique performance, portrayed through a series of acts. Their costumes are designed for quick removal, stitched in layers to facilitate an easy drop and reveal technique. Each set of costumes is specifically designed to support the themes of a given performance.

The careful planning and staging behind these performances, which make their work so effective, inspired my studio-based research, which consists of carefully designed transformable clothing, developed to enable at-risk transgender individuals in Pakistan safely transition between their male and female identities.

*Figure 7.1*

*Left: David and Dania, dress change under glitter*

A black and white photograph showing a close-up of a person's hands clasped together. The person is wearing a light-colored sleeve with a dark, intricate patterned cuff. A thin, light-colored bracelet is visible on the right wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

**METHOD**



A black and white photograph showing a close-up of a person's hands working on a piece of fabric. The hands are positioned on the left side of the frame, with fingers spread, appearing to be stitching or manipulating the fabric. The fabric is dark and has a visible texture, possibly wool or a similar material. In the background, there are more folds of fabric and a small, light-colored rectangular object, possibly a button or a piece of paper, is visible. The overall lighting is soft, creating subtle highlights and shadows on the fabric and hands. The word 'OLOGIES' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters on the lower left portion of the image.

OLOGIES

## Methodologies

With Butler's work in mind, I arranged and conducted in person interviews with four transgender individuals working at Akhuwat, located in Lahore, Pakistan. Founded in 2001, Akhuwat Clothes Bank facilitates the transfer of washed and dry-cleaned clothes from donors to underprivileged people in need. Additionally, the clothes bank manages to repair and distribute an average of 10,000 pieces of cloth every month with the help of transgender individuals as staff. By hiring the transgender individuals, Akhuwat's aim is to promote dignified employment for this at-risk segment of society.<sup>28</sup>

28 "Akhuwat Cloth Bank | AISEM," accessed February 24, 2018

Akhuwat helps the transgender community of Pakistan by providing a decent livelihood, in contrast with other companies, who often won't hire transgender individuals. I had the opportunity to talk to several transgender individuals working within Akhuwat. Before traveling to meet them in person, I conducted online interviews, for an informal introduction, and to gain an overview of the clothing bank's operation. I had the chance to speak with the project manager, Miss Neelam Gul, after which I was introduced to Miss Taj Kausar, who mentors transgender staff. Additionally, I spoke with Miss Sadiq—a transgender woman who supervises most of the work done by her fellow colleagues—and Julie, aka Faisal, who played a significant role in providing information needed for my research.

*Figure 8.0*

*Right: Niggahein working in Akhuwat*





I tried getting to know Julie, Sonia, Niggahein and Taj Kausar via video conference, but found I needed to travel to meet them in person in order to become truly acquainted with them and learn about their design needs in greater detail.

During the interviews I asked questions about their life struggles and design needs such as, "How do you respond to a violent situation?" or, "Would you want to expose yourself more in society through a defense mechanism?" These interviews provided a better understanding of the everyday struggles these individuals face, and highlighted the core problem that generates harassment. During these interviews I noticed the transgender individuals emphasized the effort of switching between their everyday clothing, in order to camouflage themselves in society. Their struggles revolved around hiding their feminine clothing while out in public, to be less conspicuous, and avoid harassment.





*Figure 8.1*  
*Julie applying makeup*



Figure 8.2  
Sonia posing for picture

The interviews provided a platform for the transgender individuals I met to share the kinds of changes they want to see in society. They not only shared stories of their struggles, but they were comfortable enough to articulate their day-to-day needs. Through these interviews, I learned that their idea of defense is completely different from what I expected. For them, the best defense involves blending into society, in order to earn a normal livelihood, as opposed to desiring the ability to respond actively to violent situations. I gained insight into Julie's notion of acceptance: though Julie is not able to dress as she prefers in the company of family and relatives, she firmly believes her family accepts her.

These interviews significantly contributed to my knowledge about this community and provided me with the opportunity to share their stories with the outside world—to raise awareness about the hardship they endure.

I also found the documentation of the in-person interviews to be significant as the images are illustrative of the conditions of Akhuwat. The data, collected from the interviews, directly informed my design outcomes, which cater to the needs of Pakistani transgender individuals.



**EXPLORATIONS**



## **Adaptable Features**

It is difficult for transgender individuals in Pakistan to dress as females in public as this invites harassment. Clothing generally represents a kind of symbolism that holds norms and values associated with a culture, but the society fails to see it as one's personal identity. Many transgender individuals struggle with this perception of socially approved clothing in their everyday life. As a result, they are victimized by public harassment and social abuse.

Of the four individuals I interviewed in person at Akhuwat, three minimize their clothing and makeup routine just to avoid unwanted attention in public. These individuals conceal their identity to conform with society's conventional expectations of male and female physical appearance. As mentioned previously, Julie is not able to dress as a female in front of her family, but she does it throughout her work day. Sonia and Niggahein both explained that they no longer wear much makeup, due to the harassment it triggers.

After the interviews, I began to research existing crossover elements of male and female Shalwar Kameez—a traditional form of clothing in Pakistan. Based on the interviews I determined that adaptability and modification of clothing were the key elements in helping transgender individuals carry themselves with ease in everyday life.

Shalwar Kameez come in male and female variants, sharing some common features, but also possessing distinguishing characteristics. Along with the shirt pattern, the most prominent feature distinguishing male from female was the collar. My attempt was to work around the constraints as well as the variability each of these elements provided in transformation.

With this in mind, my experiments tested how these features can be hidden, folded or adapted easily and quickly. After understanding the need for adaptability in their appearance, the aim of this exploration was to help transgender individuals equipped with these features modify their clothing and adapt to their circumstances, to disguise themselves and switch easily between male and female clothing—a convenient and practical performance act.



*Figure 9.0*  
*Foldable Collar*





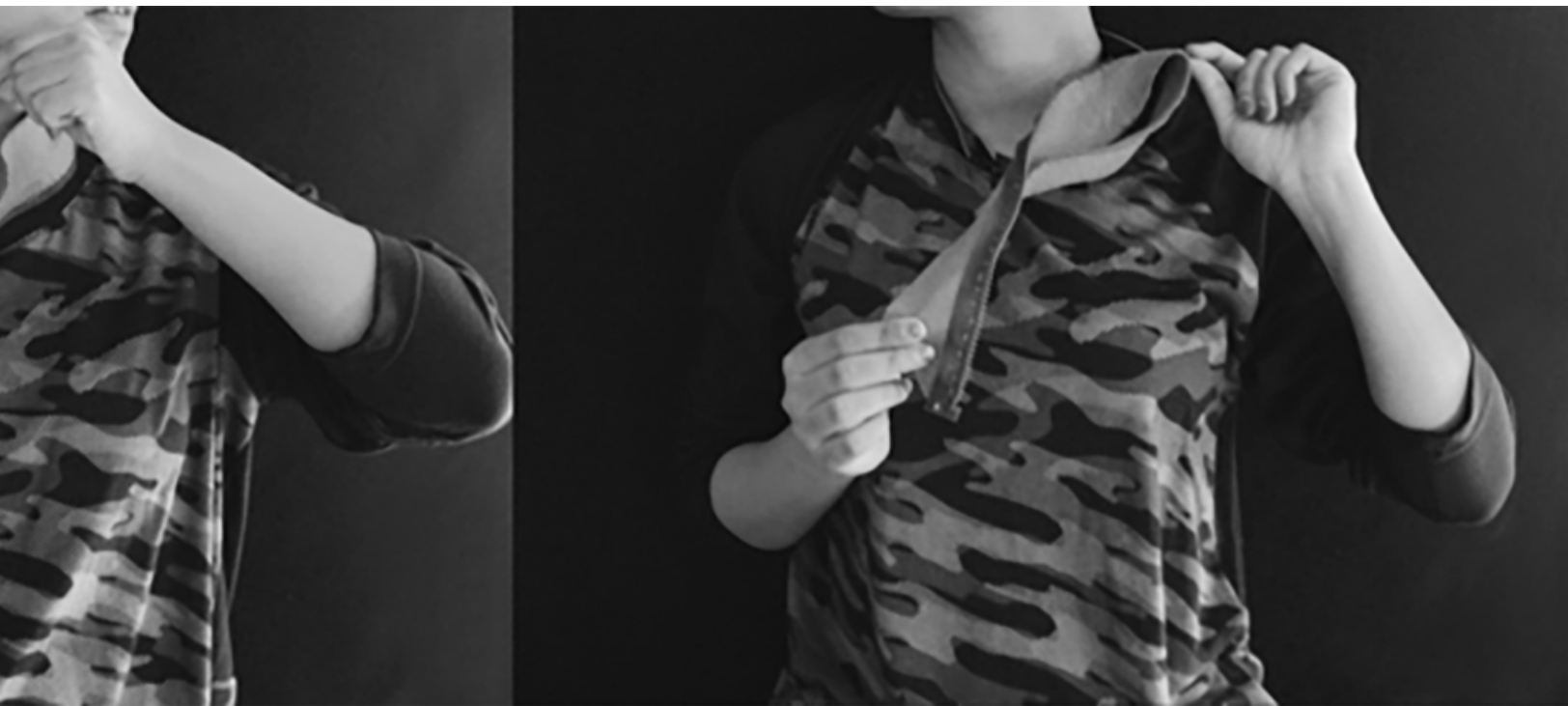
Figure 9.1  
Velcro Collar  
54





Figure 9.2  
Zipper Collar  
56







*Figure 9.3*  
*Hidden Pattern*





OUTCOMES

## Project Outcomes

Since I was a child I have been curious to know the cause of harassment and violence against the transgender community in my home country. From the window of my family's car, I remember wondering about the people hidden behind the fancy apparel, layered makeup and chunky jewelry, begging on the streets. I never understood why they were a target. I never comprehended why people referred to them as the "cursed ones."

This research grew from exploring a long-held personal curiosity, to working to fully understanding the complex social issues involved, to being in a position to interact face-to-face with individuals who struggle daily with intolerance. I realize design cannot solve the global issue of harassment and violence toward transgender individuals, but I can provide a solution tailored to the transgender community of Pakistan, to assist their survival.



## **Transformable *Shalwar Kameez***

My interviews identified the need for transformable clothes, designed to help Pakistani transgender individuals move about safely in public. I developed a design for an outfit, tailored to fit both male and female transgender individuals. Depending on the surrounding situation, the convertible shalwar kameez transforms from a female outfit to male, and vice versa. After analyzing materials and mechanisms, I developed the outfit according to the following design considerations: practicality, functionality, ease of use, and utility.

The outfit's operation was inspired by the magician's quick-change, where the performer changes from one mode to another in seconds. After studying multiple options, I developed a successful technique of layering different fabrics, to afford a quick transformation. The outfits are stitched in two layers, with the female shirt pattern on top, and the male pattern underneath. The top layer releases and drops by unsnapping buttons located on the shoulders.

An additional feature of the female outfit, known as *dupatta*, is hidden on the inside of the back of the male shirt. It is folded, hidden and held together with fabric flaps, stitched on the back. Double-layered sleeves attach with buttons that can be detached, flipped and clipped back again to reveal either printed or plain fabric. The pants convert from a fitted profile (female) to a more voluminous fit (male).



Figure 10.0  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 1



Figure 10.1  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 2



Figure 10.2  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 3



Figure 10.3  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 4





Figure 10.4  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 5



Figure 10.5  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 6



*Figure 10.6*  
*Transformable*  
*Shalwar Kameez*  
*Step 7*



*Figure 10.7*  
*Transformable*  
*Shalwar Kameez*  
*Step 8*



Figure 10.8  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 9



Figure 10.9  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 10





Figure 11.0  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez  
Step 11



Figure 11.1  
Transformable  
Shalwar Kameez



## **Adaptive *Khussas***

Pakistan's traditional shoe, known as a *khussa*, is typically handcrafted in Punjab. It has been part of the Pakistani tradition since the Mughal rule. Even though khussas vary in design and color, some key features differentiate female and male khussas.

For men, the shape is closed, with an extruded, curled toe. Women's khussas have a more rounded, plain toe. Another distinct feature of khussas is back-curve. Most female khussas have a rounder and smoother back-curve, whereas the male khussas have a slightly pointed shape in the back. I studied these features closely to guide construction of a pair of transformable male/female khussas.

This pair of transformable khussas carries design elements of both male and female varieties. The curved toe of the male shoe can be slid backward and curved inward, to completely hide the curviness of the toe. This mechanism provides customization to the shoe and allows it to be converted to the more feminine shape of the female khussa. In a similar manner, the pointed back-curve of the male shoe can be folded outward and locked, to completely eliminate the masculine shape and present a smoother back instead. This pair of transformable khussa is handmade using rexine—an artificial leather fabric—commonly used for shoes and bags, chosen for its flexibility.





Figure 11.2  
Adaptive Khussas  
Step 1



Figure 11.3  
Adaptive Khussas  
Step 2



*Figure 11.4*  
*Adaptive Khussas*  
*Step 3*



*Figure 11.5*  
*Adaptive Khussas*  
*Step 4*



## Template Guide

The template guide is designed to assist transgender individuals—working in Akhuwat—to assemble and manufacture their own transformative, personalized outfits and shoes. The template consists of the essential elements needed to build the outfits. It includes an outline of the necessary construction and process steps, a guide to seasonal patterns and color swatches, a list of construction tools, and material and fabric recommendations. Additionally, the template includes a folded cut-out draft pattern.

Considering the low literacy rate of the Pakistani transgender community, the guide is designed in Urdu, but with illustrations, to help reinforce the written language. For the purpose of the exhibition, it is also designed in English. The template would be handed over to Akhuwat to be distributed to transgender individuals who work there. Considering that Akhuwat deals with the recycling, repairing and supplying of clothes, this template will prove highly beneficial to transgender individuals, who already have strong stitching and repairing skills from working with the donated clothes. The template can be used as a guide to adapt and customize outfits already available to transgender individuals.

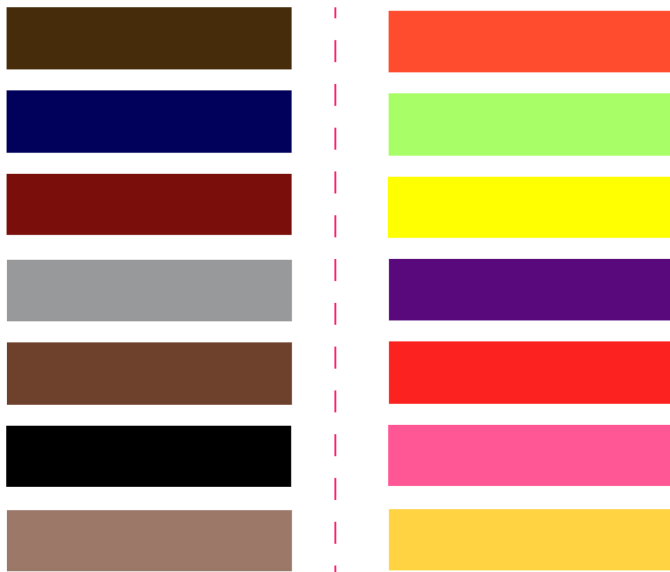
# Color Guide

Here is a small color table to help you decide!

**MIX AND MATCH YOUR FAVORITE COLORS!**

**INSIDE**

**OUTSIDE**



# What will you NEED?

If you are constructing your transformable shalwaar kameez from the scratch. You will need the following tools:

**GRAB YOUR FAVOURITE STITCHED MALE SHIRT AND LET THE FUN BEGIN!**

1. A pair of fabric scissors.
2. Some threads matching your clothes.
3. Sewing Needles.
4. Needle Cushion.
5. Thimble.
6. Threader.
7. Thread Cutter
8. Seam opener.
9. Fabric Chalk.
10. Some Rulers.
11. Measuring Tape.
12. Last but not the least, Iron and Spray!

**THESE TOOLS ARE CHEAP AND EASILY AVAILABLE AT ANY LOCAL SEWING STORE!**



**CONCLUSION**

After analyzing the above primary and secondary research, it is evident that there is no right or wrong gender. A good portion of Pakistani society is misinformed about the transgender community and the very definition of gender. Transgender individuals have to hide their true nature to conform to social norms. To help with this constant struggle to conceal underlying identity, designers should work to identify needs within disadvantaged populations and leverage the power of design to build a meaningful and functional dialog. Design can help to not only ease everyday hardship, but it can also create a path toward tolerance and compassion toward these individuals. Design research like this thesis will help to raise awareness and break down misunderstandings that separate the transgender community from society.

I imagine a more enlightened future, where one day transgender individuals will no longer want or need to disguise themselves to avoid unwanted attention and harassment. Just like the design community, other aspects of society need to become more open to learning about the trials faced by transgender individuals, and work more actively to improve their rights, leading to a future of acceptance and open-mindedness for all in Pakistan. Empowering the transgender community now will help lead toward a more open, and accepting future society. In time, this momentum can build and grow, leading to a global platform for transgender individuals to advocate for their right to live openly and experience acceptance.

**FUTURE  
DIRECTION**



My research explored the need for transformable outfits and footwear, designed to serve the transgender community of Pakistan. It was informed by direct personal interaction with four individuals. I had the opportunity to learn about the life experiences and struggles of these individuals firsthand, and I hope to continue to contribute to the betterment of this community through my work as a designer.

I was able to gain insight into many aspects of the lives of transgender individuals in Pakistan through the data collected from the observational study and in-person interviews, including understanding more fully how they present themselves to society, and the risks involved. Transformable clothing and footwear were appropriate design approaches, to address the problems they face daily. I have been asked by the project manager of Akhuwat clothes bank to present the final outcomes to Akhuwat for user testing, and to receive additional feedback. I look forward to presenting my working prototypes to the transgender community working there.

These outfits could act as a template for further, continued production of such outfits, providing the intended users with a clear understanding of their construction and operation. Future development could lead to a locally driven production process.

I would like to continue working on the theme of transformation, designing subtle, adaptive everyday objects, to effect positive change in the lives of transgender individuals in Pakistan.

## List of Figures

**[All Images belong to the author, unless otherwise stated]**

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